

Two Visions of Globalisation: An Account of the America's Cup Harbour and South Auckland

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Paper Presented at the *Creating Spaces Conference: Interdisciplinary Writings in the Social Science*, Canberra, July 2003

Introduction

A comparison of Auckland's American Express Viaduct Harbour and the southern suburb of Otahuhu provide a powerful and compelling illustration of the complexities of globalisation. Global processes have shaped and formed the character and nature of both spaces. On one hand, the American Express Viaduct Harbour, home until recently to yachting's America's Cup fleet, is a product of global economic success, or rather, global economic excess. The harbour is a playground for elites (and those wishing to bask in reflective glory) who conspicuously consume (Veblen 1994) global super-brands like Tag Heuer, Louis Vuitton, Prada, and Omega. On the other hand, Otahuhu, in Auckland's suburban south, represents a very different image of globalisation. The influence of globalisation in Otahuhu has contributed to economic hardship and mass unemployment (Child Youth and Family National Office 2003). Yet global forces have also triggered

waves of migration from the South Pacific, South East Asia, and most recently, from the Middle East and the African Horn leading to ambitious experiments with multiculturalism. Globalisation has caused Otahuhu to become a fragile, yet vibrant and tremendously exciting community. However, in exploring the effects of global processes on these two very different spaces within Auckland, simple responses do not yield a complete picture. Such is the complexity of globalisation's outcomes that crude, one-dimensional notions of good and bad must be put aside.

Despite the excessive abundance of capital and the captains of post-industry the American Express Viaduct Harbour is not the devil's paradise. Nor, is Otahuhu a utopian paradise of trans-ethnic bliss. Conversely, the mirror explanations of these spaces are just as unhelpful. The Viaduct Harbour is not the promised land of milk and honey, while Otahuhu is not a multicultural ghetto destined to collapse under the weight of unemployment, gambling, drug abuse, and violence. A more accurate portrayal of the Viaduct Harbour and Otahuhu understands the sophistication of global processes. The Viaduct Harbour and Otahuhu exist as a result of globalisation. Multiple, global forces have contributed to the identity, strengths, and weaknesses of each space. This paper has been constructed through images of the Viaduct Harbour and Otahuhu observed during the final week of the Louis Vuitton Cup (the lead-up competition to the America's Cup), in January 2003. During this week, aspects of mobility and ethnicity, consumption, and community and place were witnessed and recorded. This piece has been written through the eyes of a traveller (De Botton 2002). It captures the fleeting, initial responses to a new space that shape our lasting impression of our environment. When I arrived in

Auckland it was as a tourist. I never intended to write about Auckland. Indeed, I was travelling to get away from writing. However, whatever I saw I related back to my academic interests. As De Botton (2002) points out, however much people try when travelling you cannot separate yourself from all your emotional and intellectual baggage. This paper is the product of my travels. Perhaps it could be subtitled, 'A sociologist on holidays' because it is both an academic piece and a travelogue.

Through my observations a comparison of the Viaduct Harbour and Otahuhu as spaces deeply impacted by global processes was made. In some cases strong similarities existed between each space. In particular, within both Otahuhu and the Viaduct Harbour the deployment of visual signs (Barthes 1979) to indicate ethnicity and status was prevalent. However, in other cases global forces could be observed impacting on each space in very different and paradoxical ways. By reviewing the contradictions and paradoxes on these two areas of Auckland an appreciation can be developed of the complex and intricate influence of global forces that is rarely clear, simple, or easily definable (Urry 2003).

The Spaces

Global processes brought the Viaduct Harbour to Auckland. Before New Zealand won the right to host the America's Cup the Viaduct Harbour was an underused and dilapidated marina facility. However, in 1996, a massive rebuilding program was initiated that thoroughly transformed and gentrified the space. As well as facilities for each team involved in racing, berths were constructed for visiting spectator boats (mostly multimillion-dollar 'toys for grown-up boys' bearing flags and insignias from Bermuda,

Britain, or the San Diego Yacht Club). Additionally, upmarket pubs, restaurants, and cafes, luxurious apartment buildings, boutique stores selling Prada, Omega, and Tag Heuer, and a Hilton Hotel designed to resemble an Ocean Liner were all constructed on or near the boardwalk. Seven years later when I arrived at the Harbour, the facility had become a major and well-organised tourist attraction. In many ways the American Express Viaduct Harbour resembles other inner-city park-like attractions such as Sydney's Darling Harbour, or Brisbane's or Melbourne's Southbank precincts. Many of the generic features are present. Trendy cafes, restaurants, and apartment complexes line clean mosaic pathways, while hundreds of tourists, like myself, mill about, dodge joggers and street performers; enjoy the sun and the exorbitant displays of wealth on both the boats and boardwalks. The Viaduct Harbour and all its cafes, million-dollar apartments, and boutique stores owe their entire existence to a sailing race, the America's Cup. Of course, asserting that the America's Cup is 'a sailing race,' is akin to suggesting that the Gold Coast Indy Grand Prix is a 'Sunday Drive', or that the Super Bowl is just a football game. The America's Cup is an enigmatic event. While the America's Cup does possess similarities to other international mega-events (Roche 2000), like the Summer Olympics and Football World Cup, the spectacle has more in common with the small collection of elite global-trotting world sporting circuses such as Formula One Powerboat and Automobile racing. On first appearances this is an event, it seems, designed to sell as much merchandise as possible, and, occasionally, if time and weather permits sailing far away in the Hauraki Gulf. Yet as the events in March proved the existence of the Viaduct Harbour was always tenuous. Every three years the 'Auld Mug' and the right to host the America's Cup are contested between two yachts, the holder and a challenger. In March,

Swiss entrant Team Alinghi defeated Team New Zealand winning both the America's Cup and the right to host the event². With the loss the Viaduct Harbour lost its appeal, aura, and land prices jeopardising the economic success of Auckland's wealthiest area and one of its major tourist attractions.

Approximately twenty kilometres south of Downtown Auckland and its glittering Viaduct Harbour is the suburb of Otahuhu. In a city gouged by the sea, Otahuhu exists in a geographical bottleneck. Everybody travelling south must pass through the city's impressive but terribly inefficient expressway system. However, despite its position as an obligatory point of passage for tourists heading south, the three major locally produced guidebooks to Auckland make no mention of Otahuhu. This is a suburb far away from information kiosks. It is a suburb that tourists see only fleetingly as their rental cars or coaches whiz past. Yet global forces have had as much impact on Otahuhu as the Viaduct Harbour. The most apparent impact has been migration and mobility. Otahuhu is home to an array of ethnic, religious, and cultural groups. Flights from persecution, war, intolerance, or economic hardship have resulted in an influx of people from the South Pacific (Ethnic Fijians; Fijian Indians; Samoans; Tongans; Cook Islanders; Ethnic Niue), Eastern Europe, and most recently the Indian Subcontinent, Middle East, and East Africa. Later I would learn that according to 1996 Census statistics the population of Otahuhu comprised of 31% Pacific People, 19% Maori, 14% Asian, 32% European, with 4% listed as other (Child Youth and Family National Office 2003: 8). As a young white Australian of European extraction I felt like an outsider as I have never felt before despite the friendliness I experienced from locals.

At first glance, Otahuhu is quite unremarkable. The landscape is typical Auckland suburban sprawl, reminiscent of Melbourne's outer west, with small, mostly single storey houses with small lush front yards and an abundance of little 'hotted-up' motor vehicles. The main street, protected by traffic-calming devices is lined with small stores selling clothes, groceries, and other essentials. Like most urban areas the sidewalks are grimy, graffiti is commonplace, and the public transport is reliable if a little unsophisticated. Otahuhu and the surrounding South Auckland area have a reputation as being the toughest suburbs in New Zealand. This is the New Zealand infamously depicted in the films *Once Were Warriors* and *What Has Become of the Broken Hearted?*. It is suburb where unemployment is common and the signs of alcoholism, prostitution, poker machine addiction, and drug abuse are visible even during daylight hours. However, the purpose of this article is not to stigmatise Otahuhu. I should not and cannot pass judgements on a place that I visited for only a week and of which I profess no cultural or historical awareness. Instead, what I found more interesting, significant, and compelling was the contrast of images witnessed between Otahuhu and the Viaduct Harbour. In particular, I was struck by the multiple, and in many case contradictory, yet similar, ways in which global forces had impacted on each space.

Mobility and Ethnicity

One of the most intriguing contrasts between Otahuhu and the Viaduct Harbour occurs in the fields of mobility and ethnicity. Firstly, in both spaces a clear distinction exists between the two types of mobility (Urry 2000a; Urry 2000b). At the Viaduct Harbour

mobility exists in the form as international travel and tourism, while in Otahuhu, migration and resettlement are the dominant paradigm. The Viaduct Harbour is the archetypal playground for wealthy global nomads (Makimoto and Manners 1997; Sklair 1998). For the elite few the Viaduct Harbour existed as an oasis where they could moor the multimillionaire-dollar yacht, enjoy the delights of success and excess and discuss their latest corporate venture. For the bulk of the tourist population (everybody including locals at the Viaduct Harbour take the role of tourists) the Viaduct Harbour is a voyeuristic experience. It provides a chance to witness, albeit fleetingly, the lifestyle of the super rich. The 'ordinary' people are, of course, warmly welcomed and provided with ample opportunity to purchase a little symbolic taste of their magnificence through the acquisition of an America's Cup tie, cigarette lighter case, hat, windcheater, or set of wine glasses.

In Otahuhu, however, the image of global mobility is much different. As mentioned previously, Otahuhu has for many years been the first stop for immigrants arriving in New Zealand. Rather than a playground for the bourgeoisie, Otahuhu represents for many an opportunity, a place to start again, and escape the injustices of the world. In the last twenty years Otahuhu has become a new home for various ethnic groups from around the world. From ethnic Pacific Islanders including Samoans, Tongans, Fijians, Solomon Islanders, and Ethnic Niue; to Vietnamese and Taiwanese; Fijian Indians; Ethnic Indian, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankans, Pakistanis, and Lebanese, to the most recent arrivals from Afghanistan, Iran and East Africa, Otahuhu has become one of New Zealand's most ethnically diverse suburbs. However, while important differences exist between the

spaces, similarities also abound. In both Otahuhu and the Viaduct Harbour ethnicity is frequently represented through symbols and logos. Everywhere are examples of Anderson (1991)'s *Imagined Communities*. Nationalities are reduced to placenames on t-shirts, logos on hats, or sporting jerseys. In Otahuhu, rugby union jerseys are regularly used to demarcate ethnicity as locals wear the colours of Tonga, Samoa, Niue, or Fiji. Similarly, at the Viaduct Harbour, tourists fly the flag of their home nation on t-shirts, ties, or baseball caps, while above them, the ever-present corporate-style New Zealand 'loyal' silver fern logo beams out on billboards and downtown office blocks. In the corporate never-never land of the Viaduct Harbour ethnicity is represented as unproblematic. Whether ethnicity is as trouble-free in Otahuhu, however, is difficult to speculate. News reports (Dearnaley 2001; Gower 2002; Inglis 2000) tell of gang related crime but cases of inter-gang warfare based on ethnic demarcations are more difficult to pinpoint.

Consumption

The contrasts between Otahuhu and the Viaduct Harbour do not end with ethnicity and mobility. Significant paradoxes and contradictions exist between the global commodities consumed in each space. In both the Viaduct Harbour and Otahuhu the standards of multinational corporations herald the possibility of global consumption. However, and not surprisingly, great differences exist between the types of commodities and companies paraded. In Otahuhu, American based international fast-food companies such as Burger King, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and Pizza Hut dot the landscape. These are accompanied with clothing stores selling American youth brands such as FUBU and Adidas, or

merchandise promoting the Wu Tang Clan or American Football's National Football League. However, global consumption patterns are not limited to United States paraphernalia. With the diverse range of ethnic groups comes an array of truly international fare. On Otahuhu's main strip, adjacent to the Kentucky Fried Chicken store, is a restaurant marketed to locals that sells traditional Polynesian hangi meals. Down the road, near the Indian restaurant and the Oriental Supermarket is a store that sells traditional clothing from the Pacific Islands and the Indian sub-continent. In Otahuhu, despite the prevalence of American influences, global consumption means more than chicken nuggets and Canary-Yellow tracksuits.

Likewise at the Viaduct Harbour a gamut of international consumer goods assaults the senses. However, unlike Otahuhu, here it is the global mega-brands that reside. Brands like Prada, American Express, Davidoff, Evian, Tag Heuer, Louis Vuitton, Corona, Omega, Mont Blanc, and Montecristo that through symbolic qualities and are transformed in to commodity-signs (Baudrillard 1996; 1998) associated with values of wealth, luxury, exoticism, and an aura of the unattainable. Consumption at the Viaduct Harbour is clearly driven by a desire to display and connote, to flaunt the emblematic goods acquired through symbolic processes in capitalism. Here a parallel exists between consumption practices within Otahuhu and the Viaduct Harbour. Whether purchasing Polo Ralph Lauren shirts, Big Macs, printed cloth to make traditional-style Pacific Islander body wraps, or Heineken beer, consumers in the Viaduct Harbour and Otahuhu are participating in the same system of international consumption, which, although may involve very different commodities, operates with identical processes of symbolic

exchange (Barthes, 1979; Baudrillard, 1996; 1998; Featherstone 1991). As explored in more detail elsewhere (Parker, Forthcoming) consumers purchase goods not for their use-value but their sign-value (Baudrillard, 1996: 1998). Demarcation is critical to consumers. The deployment of symbolic goods is used in individual expression or to signify group membership. Class, status, taste (Woodward, 2001), ethnicity, and social identity are all demarcated through the consumption and use of visual indicators. While the goods at the Viaduct Harbour and Otahuhu may have drastically different price tags they serve the same purpose, to communicate a consumer's identity.

Community and Place

The final contradictions observed between the Viaduct Harbour and Otahuhu occurred within the notions of community and place. The global forces that formed each space creating the unique multinational atmosphere of people and products also impacted on sense of community and place. In particular, while Otahuhu exists as a distinct community with observable notions of identity and place, the Viaduct Harbour appears to possess many characteristics of what Auge (1995) labelled *non-place*. For Auge (1995) *non-places* are a by-product of increasing speed and mobility within 'supermodernity' and are exemplified by their homogeneity, and impersonality. The Viaduct Harbour would appear to be an archetypical version of a *non-place*. The Viaduct Harbour exists as a largely impersonal and homogenous space. As mentioned previously, it strongly resembles sites like Sydney's Darling Harbour and promotes the ever-present global mega-brands. It is a space where the 'local' has been reduced to sign and sold as a tiepin. Through the replication of signs, images, and ideas there is no connection to place.

Moreover, the atmosphere of the Viaduct Harbour as a global playground contributes to a feeling of anonymity in the face of overwhelming images of the ideal, international cosmopolitan globetrotter (Makimoto and Manners 1997). Everyone becomes a tourist, a voyeur, and a symbolic consumer. We all mingle, gaze, and find our own piece of mass-produced memorabilia to say that we were there³.

In contrast, the contribution of globalisation on Otahuhu has contributed to its very sense of place. Various ethnic identities are displayed clearly on the streets creating an environment different to even most celebrated multicultural cities in the world such as Sydney or Toronto. Although ‘vibrant community’ is an overused cliché, too regularly applied to towns that are anything but vibrant, Otahuhu, I believe, lives up to the billing of the banner hung across its main street that displays that awful expression. Nothing is impersonal in Otahuhu everything is far too vivid, colourful, and alive. However, at some level, the contrast between Otahuhu and the Viaduct Harbour should be expected.

Although global processes may have created both spaces it was very different global processes that created them. The Viaduct Harbour is a carefully managed facility. It was meticulously planned, catering for the demands and desires of event participants, sponsors, international tourists, and business owners. The designers and managers of the Viaduct Harbour created exactly what they intended; a secure playground oasis for elitist global business nomads. In contrast, Otahuhu has been formed through waves of unpredictable yet hopeful mass-migration. It is not stable or stagnant. Rather, the character of Otahuhu is constantly shifting and ever-changing. Indeed, distant economic events, wars, civil instability, and religious or ethnic intolerance impact on Otahuhu in

ways unimaginable in the safe world of the Viaduct Harbour. Paradoxically, it would seem, Otahuhu as a community is in some ways far more globally connected than the temporary home of some of the world's business elites. International events have a far greater impact in Otahuhu. Wars, famine, and other disasters impact because the residents of Otahuhu have very real connections with diasporic communities (Skrbis 1999) overseas. In contrast, the 'cosmopolitan nomads' of the viaduct harbour lead an existence sheltered from the many of the problems and injustices of the world.

Concluding Remarks

Although separated in geographical terms by only twenty kilometres, Otahuhu and the Viaduct Harbour are, in some ways, worlds apart. Yet, there also exist great similarities between the two spaces that extend well beyond their place as areas within Auckland. Global processes shaped each space bringing widely divergent populations. The American Express Viaduct Harbour, its very name sold to a company that represents the principles of 'casino' capitalism (Strange 1986), became a home away from home for global elites escaping the Northern Hemisphere winter, while Otahuhu has become a new home for people escaping a multitude of tragedies of various scales and scope. However, despite their differences, parallels in displays of ethnicity and consumer goods can be observed. Such is the complexity and paradoxical nature of global processes that the Viaduct Harbour and Otahuhu are similar yet different, comparable yet antonymous. Through a comparison of snapshots observed in January 2003 this paper has explored the sometimes-contradictory affects of globalisation on the suburb of Otahuhu and the American Express Viaduct Harbour. In examining the fields of mobility and ethnicity,

consumption, and community and place it must be asserted that the sophisticated and intricate impact of globalisation on both spaces should not be explained by simple one-dimensional responses. When compared the Viaduct Harbour and Otahuhu exist as complex sites created and influenced by multiple forces. Their combination of parallels and distinctions may be intriguing in their own right, but more importantly, the Viaduct Harbour and Otahuhu highlight the sophistication and complexity of global processes that occur in sites across the globe.

Footnotes

¹ I would like to thank Gavin Kendall, Steve Jender, Bree Heffernan, and Marchelle Slagter-Knowles for their comments and insights. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance of Gary Parker and the hospitality shown by, Jerry and Gerry Fecteau.

² As Switzerland possesses no coastline Team Alinghi will be able to sell the rights to host the next series. At present Lisbon and Majorca are the leading candidates.

³ In saying this I don't wish to present this search as negative or unfulfilling. Instead, my aim is to point out that people are purchasing items that are replicas representing a place or non-place that is a replica in itself. There are parallels here with Baudrillard's (1983) theories of simulacrum where reality exists as copy of a copy. Incidentally, I too engaged in this practice purchasing a silver cigarette lighter case featuring an engraving of the America's Cup trophy.

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